



Serbian Armed Forces Transformation and the Role of Human Capital Strategy

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At noon on March 24, 2010, all discussions ceased as the eight members of the Serbian delegation stood for a minute of silence to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the NATO Bombing of Yugoslavia (Operation Allied Force/Noble Anvil).

With the peaceful breakup of the Montenegro-Serbia confederation in 2006, Yugoslavia disappeared from the maps of Europe. Over the 15 year period that encompassed the breakup of the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, each newly independent entity had to deal with its identity as a separate nation and the incumbent national requirements for security, economic stability, and political maturity. Complicating the security issue was forming multiple armies from one. Once a unified military force, the conscript-based Yugoslavian National Army (JNA) is now distributed across six independent Balkan states. This distribution was not based on military requirements, capabilities, or expertise, but on geography and ethnicity.

Within the Balkan region there is a shared desire for integration into the European Community. A prerequisite for such integration is the modernization of the national security apparatus. For this reason, Serbia, like their neighbors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia, has a certain urgency to transform its national military organization. This transformation includes the modernization of equipment and increasing the professionalism of their armed forces, including the elimination of conscription. To assist in this transformation to a professional, all-voluntary military, the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) are tapping into both European and U.S. expertise for ideas on creating an effective and efficient Serbian Human Resource Management (HRM) system that supports its national security goals, achieves modern standards, and exhibits real capabilities.



SUPPORTING MILITARY TO MILITARY INITIATIVES

For those who may not associate a series of expert talks on HRM systems with the strengthening of defense relationships in the Balkans, this event was a solid reminder of the importance of military to military (M2M) security cooperation initiatives within the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM). The multi-service U.S. Army

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War College (USAWC) Traveling Contact Team (TCT) consisting of Professor Bernard F. Griffard, Commander Traci Keegan, USN, and Lieutenant Colonel Vincent R. Lindenmeyer, journeyed to Belgrade, Serbia 21-26 March 2010, and exchanged insights on human resource management processes with SAF and Ministry of Defense (MoD) personnel who are dealing with difficult force transformation challenges on a daily basis.

The major challenges the SAF face are the abolition of general conscript duty, the rebalancing of the force to reflect the desired officer/NCO/enlisted/civilian ratios, development of a modern professional military education system, and the achievement of social status improvement for SAF personnel. During the three days of discussions the USAWC TCT addressed the SAF challenges within the context of the HRM Life Cycle Model's six objective areas: Acquire, Develop, Utilize, Sustain, Promote, and Transition. The dialogue encouraged the SAF personnel directorate officers to begin crafting a human capital strategy and leader development strategy as the next step for their personnel management transformation.



U.S. and SAF delegates discuss common Human Resource Management goals

Discussions in each of these areas were enhanced by the expertise of the individual SAF attendees. With the conversion to a professional force, topics of recruitment, force development, sustainment and utilization were of great interest to the officers serving in the personnel directorate of the SAF. Of particular relevance, the SAF appreciated the insights garnered from the discussions on the U.S. officer evaluation and promotion processes.

AN EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AMONG PROFESSIONALS

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FOCUS POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

Professional Military Education. A point of agreement was the importance of a well managed professional military education (PME) program that supported officer and NCO career progression. The SAF is in the process of a Military-Educational System Reform (MESR). The review of the U.S. Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) system was of particular interest to the SAF as they begin to harmonize the MESR with the Serbian civilian educational system while, at the same time, attempting to achieve PME interoperability with the Euro-Atlantic military education programs. An example of the importance of such efforts was demonstrated at a hosted dinner during the visit. At the dinner we were joined by COL Predrag Pandic, U.S. National War College (NWC) '09, and COL Sasa Stefanovic, NWC '08. This proved to be an excellent opportunity to discuss the SAF in a relaxed, give and take environment. Our dialogue reinforced the importance of the International Fellows (IF) programs at all U.S. Senior Level Colleges. Upon their return to Serbia, both officers were placed in key planning and policy development positions where their war college experience provided immediate benefit to the SAF. LTC Sreckovic, the Serbian IF in the 2010 USAWC class, will be another key contributor to SAF transformation when he returns to Belgrade.

Quality Of Life. The SAF delegation identified major obstacles in achieving the quality of life goals necessary for retaining the professional soldier. They must raise the standard of living through better benefits and improved housing. Strategies must address soldier motivation and improved job efficiency, for achieving higher levels of functional capability, and developing documentation to ensure adequate force manning. Success in these areas will contribute to an improved professional image and a higher social standing in the eyes of the Serbian public. Drawing on the U.S experiences in converting to the all-volunteer force, the TCT was able to provide insights into some of the HR strategies employed to address these same issues.

Conscription. While in most societies the move away from conscription is welcomed by the target population, for Serbia there are complications. Over time conscription has become a "rite of passage" for young Serbian males. The

conversion to an all-volunteer force removes this important event from the lives of most young Serbian adults creating a cultural obstacle that the SAF must address. An option being studied is the institution of a short basic training period for all of age males, followed by a reserve obligation. This is expensive on two counts, first, the actual cost of training, and second, the establishment of a reserve overhead to manage this asset.



Bigadier General Sladan Djordjevic, Chief, Personnel Division, Serbian MoD, stresses the importance of learning from each other's experiences

Diversity. The issue of diversity will become important to the SAF in the very near future. Women have only been attending the Military Academy since 2007 and only a few women have ever been promoted to senior military ranks. Pointed questions illuminated that those who promoted to senior ranks were mostly from the medical field. This was discussed as an area to consider more exploration as the SAF pursues the all-volunteer force concept. Of interest, the Serbian Armed Forces website highlights the service of women in uniform, (http://www.vs.rs/index.php?women_in_saf=yes). In summary, the SAF will want to ensure they have a pool of the best and brightest officers to retain and that pool will most likely need to consist of a very diverse group, including women.

Human Capital Strategy. A comprehensive human capital strategy that addresses all human resource management personnel activities: acquisition, development, utilization, sustainment, promotion, and transition, is essential to building and sustaining an all-volunteer force. Personnel planners must take an active part in the development of the SAF roles and missions. As key players in the evolution of the transformation endstate, they can design a leader development strategy to guide how the force is trained and educated.

SERBIA – AN OLD STATE ON A NEW EUROPEAN SKY

The 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO is not a forgotten incident. The not so subtle remains of this conflict are prominently on display in Belgrade. Damaged buildings within the MoD campus are visible from the nearby U.S. Embassy, and the bomb-damaged Chinese diplomatic facility stands unrepaired and unoccupied, intentional reminders that events of the past are part of the process toward building to the future. For Serbia, this future lies within Europe.

Although the Serbian body politic favors increased integration with the European community, there is considerably less enthusiasm for pursuing NATO accession. While their neighbors are either NATO members or are actively seeking membership, Serbia is satisfied with the current Partnership for Peace (PfP) relationship. In discussions with members of the U.S. Country Team and the SAF delegation, the conclusion drawn is less complex. From Serbia's view, being surrounded by NATO countries, provides the same alliance security benefits without the political exposure of integration into the actual organization.

STRENGTHENING THE RELATIONSHIP

The key objective for the SAF is the ability to operate as part of a European or International force. A human capital strategy that grows and sustains a professional armed force is critical to meeting this objective. The most essential building block to a human capital strategy is developing a leader development strategy with a professional military education system that trains and educates an all-volunteer force. The all-volunteer force becomes



PROF Griffard, CDR Traci Keegan, LTC Savo Iriskic, and LTC Nermin Jusufovic follow the discussion on maximizing officer performance

a critical national security and economic engine for the nation while involving a majority of society. The SAF have identified various issues, such as quality of life and conscription, as critical areas to tackle in their reform process. In addition, they need to emphasize leader development and recruiting strategy that addresses both cultural issues and the needs of the all-volunteer force. As they build their planning processes and progress along the transformation roadmap, continued USEUCOM TCT support is critical for strengthening the professional relationships that currently exist. Future support may include subject matter expertise in the profession of arms, civil-military relations, crisis action planning, and personnel acquisition. The end state becomes a SAF prepared and ready for specific roles and missions as a partner with NATO or contributing member of UN international missions. Interoperability develops an efficient and effective force for the international stage while bringing increased national pride and sovereignty to the nation.



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